Valedictory Oration

PRONOUNCED AT THE

COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY

ON THE

GRADUATION OF THE CLASS

OF

1794.

BY

JOHN BRADFORD WALLACE,

OF THE SAID CLASS.

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PREFACE.

THE recent excellent effort which has been made at Princeton College New Jersey, by Dr. Samuel Davies Alexander, to preserve some history of the persons who graduated there during the 18th century, has invited a transfer from the single form of an ancient manuscript, into a few copies of the fresh and tasteful pages which the printing press of Mr. Joel Munsell knows so well how to give, of the Valedictory Oration delivered at the college, in the year 1794. Some mention is made of the speaker of it in Dr. Alexander's work above mentioned, — "Princeton College during the 18th Century."

The literary merit of the discourse is perhaps not inferior to that of most similar discourses delivered in the same or kindred places since. Passages on pages 9 and 10, relating to the first Revolution in France, may have "something of that indistinct and headstrong ardor for liberty" which Dr. Johnson tells us, in his life of Lyttelton, "a man of genius always catches when he enters the world,

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and always suffers to cool as he passes forward." It is certain that whatever admiration for liberty, as illustrated in the revolution just named, Mr. Wallace may have entertained at the age of seventeen, he did suffer very soon afterwards to do more than "cool." The passage on page 11, relative to the reign of "equal laws and liberty" in "this new world" when read in the present day, may perhaps be thought striking in view of its having been delivered in 1794. While little of "old experience" had been attained, at that day, by the speaker, the aspiration then uttered by him may yet be thought to have in it "something like prophetic strain."

PHILADELPHIA, *April* 11, 1874.

VALEDICTORY ORATION.

TO an enlarged and contemplative mind, no exercise of its faculties can afford more pleasure than that of tracing the progressive improvement of the human race. Formed, as we are, for the social state, mutually dependent on each other's aid, it was kindly ordered by Heaven that we should sympathize in each other's woe, and participate in each other's joy.

In the ordinary walks of life when we behold genius and talents and virtue depressed by misfortune, our hearts bleed at the sight; but when we view them rising on the public eye, attracting attention and compelling esteem, we take an interest in their success and exult in their eventual triumph.

When from individuals the attention of the mind is directed to nations, our interest increases with the magnitude of the object. The Philanthropist with a pure and elevated joy beholds his species rising from barbarity or slavery, to civilization or liberty. He marks with attention the time, the means and the result of unfolding improvements, and glows with pleasure at the prospect.

Nearly at one period were three great discoveries made, which in their operation have given a new aspect to human affairs; the mariner's compass, the art of printing and the American hemisphere.

By means of the first, the seaman whose midnight way was directed by the precarious light of the stars, whose timid course lay near the shore, amid rocks and shoals, now guided by the magnetic needle, launches boldly into the deep, defies the tempest and the waves, explores seas and islands hitherto unknown; nay circumnavigates the globe itself.

To the press we are indebted for the preservation and diffusion of knowledge. Learning, no longer confined to a few monks, is, at

present, scattered through every class of the people, and its rays, which once illumined only the cloister, now visit and bless the cottage. The bud of genius which of old, would have withered in obscurity, now unfolds its bosom to the day and scatters its fragrance round. And virtue fostered by science enlarges the empire of human happiness.

But the discovery of America, combined with the use of letters, has in the order of Providence produced events which overwhelm the mind in astonishment.

Although the first European settlers of the Southern continent, urged by ambition and avarice, subjected the natives to the severest slavery, and though subsequent settlers have imported the unfortunate children of Africa to till the lands of idle and unthankful masters, yet Heaven, in mercy to mankind, has reserved some portions of this new world, some happy portions, sheltered from the deadly heat of the torrid, and from the intense rigors of the frigid zone, which furnish a resort to persecuted virtue, an asylum to oppressed liberty. To this land of peace our ancestors

cast an eye of hope. Their principles were too just and too elevated for the place and period in which they lived. Enemies alike to error and corruption in church and state, they sought to found religion on the word of God, and government on the rights of man. But their doctrines rendered their situation painful and perilous. And "because they would not bend before the shrine of superstition and worship royalty, they were condemned to the furnace of persecution. But a redeeming spirit from above rescued them from the threatening flame and conducted them safely to this region of liberty."

The same spirit of tyranny which exiled the first emigrants to America from the shores of Britain has not ceased to pursue their descendants. Willing, nay anxious to maintain a connection with the mother country, we asked only a participation in the rights of British subjects. We solicited only a secure enjoyment of those privileges which Englishmen possessed at home. But a corrupted ministry, deaf to our petitions, would receive us, on no terms but unconditional submission

to their will and pleasure. The indignant spirit of Americans could not brook this submission. Fearless of danger and confiding in Heaven, they crowded round the standard of liberty. On the attack on their country they sacrificed health, ease and property. In freedom's cause they fought, they bled, they conquered. What their valor won, their wisdom secured. No sooner had they retired from the field of war, than they began to perfect their civil constitutions for the preservation of those equal rights, which their arms had vindicated. Under the auspices of those governments founded on the rights and established for the happiness of the people, these States have advanced in a rapid progression of improvement as unexpected, as it is unparalleled in the history of mankind.

In the blessings thus resulting from the establishment of liberty and equal laws, the philosopher possesses a source of exalted pleasure. And this pleasure is eminently increased by the prospect of other nations deriving similar blessings from like causes. The spark elicited in the concussion between England

and America, borne across the Atlantic and alighting on the inflammable mind of France, has kindled a blaze which promises to pervade and purify the world. Behold the despots of Europe making a last struggle to support their tottering thrones! See the proselytes of Roman superstition, with all their host of vices and prejudices, scattered and consumed by the rising splendors of reason and liberty! See, too, the oppressed vassals of Europe, ready to resume their long lost rights, and to avenge their accumulated wrongs! On them a new era has dawned. Their emancipation is at hand. Their tyrants tremble. See, too, the mighty people of France, those pioneers of universal liberty, with principles more formidable to despotism than their arms, advance in support of European freedom!

To that great republic has it indeed been given to unlock the prison bars, and to strike his shackles from the suffering captive. Not a slave can now exist in all its wide domains. Though torn from Africa by mercantile avarice, 'though reft of liberty by the fate of battle, or though his own hand may have

signed away his freedom, yet no sooner does any son of Adam alight on the Gallic shore than his shackles fall around him, his body expands beyond the measure of his chains, his soul walks forth in her native majesty, and he stands redeemed, regenerated and disenthralled' by the magic influence of universal liberty.

May the period yet arrive when the same encomium may be as justly applicable to America as to France! when reason treading under foot every prejudice, and benevolence breaking asunder the cords of self interest, may render knowledge accessible as the air, and liberty diffusive as the light!

Oh! may this spirit, leaping every mound,
Pervade each state and spread its blessings round,
Till equal laws and liberty shall reign,
And not one slave in this new world remain.

In hastening the approach of this period each of us in his own sphere may in a degree contribute. The cultivation of science, and the practice of all the civil and domestic virtues, are the means by which it must be accelerated. And those who patronize and promote the

instruction of the ignorant, whose lips and examples are employed in disseminating truth and virtue — those are indeed the best friends to the happiness of mankind, and the best servants of their divine Master and Guide.

To the Governor and Trustees.

In this honorable class, we have the pleasure of seeing your Excellency and you, reverend and worthy gentlemen. On you has devolved the sacred charge of superintending the interests of the institution in this place. From your cares has it derived many advantages. Under your direction has it grown up and flourished. From it have lights been sent abroad into the world, whose rays have reflected honor on you, and benefits on our country. May we, who are now on the last stage of our collegiate course, contribute our part to support the credit of this seminary! This we know is the best return we can make for your disinterested labors, and this we hope, will be our constant aim.

While life remains, we trust that a grateful sense of your care and patronage will not cease to animate those hearts and lips, which now unite in bidding your Excellency and you, reverend and worthy gentlemen, a most sincere and respectful FAREWELL.

TO THE PRESIDENT.*

To you, reverend Sir, permit us next to express our obligations. We forget not that to promote the interest of literature, you left your native country and the friends of your youth. We forget not that at an advanced period of life, you again crossed the Atlantic to further the welfare of this rising seminary. You have already seen many distinguished characters in public life, whose virtues as well as eminence are the fruits of your instruction. Aided by your precepts, and animated by their examples, we dare to hope, that by following the paths of virtue, we also may attain to true

*The Reverend Dr. Witherspoon.

honor. And while we devoutly pray that Providence may spare your valuable life as a blessing to those who follow us, permit us, Reverend Sir, from hearts impressed with respect and gratitude, to bid you FAREWELL.

TO THE VICE PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS AND TUTORS.

To you, our reverend Vice President, and other gentlemen of the faculty, the immediate guardians of our morals and directors of our studies, we would likewise pay this last act of duty and affection as your pupils. And believe us, it is not discharged merely as a customary form, but from hearts penetrated with the warmest sentiments of esteem and obligation. By you, have we been furnished with those lights of science and those principles of virtue, which are calculated to render us happy in ourselves and useful to others. May the good seeds which you have sown in our minds spring up and produce a rich harvest of knowledge and usefulness! Deeply fixed in our

hearts, your precepts shall be our counsellors, in every trying exigence. Whether surrounded by the gayeties of fashionable life, or immersed in the pursuits of fortune or of fame, they shall influence our hearts by their "still small voice," when yours, as to us, shall be silent as the grave. We leave you, gentlemen, with bosoms full of respect and gratitude. But though removed as to place, let us not be removed from your recollection. Still hold us to your hearts. Still bear us on your prayers. Pray for our future welfare and usefulness, that we may be such men and Christians as you have endeavored to make us. And, that those beams of celestial bliss which gild the last moments of the just and good may brighten each day of your existence here, is the ardent prayer of those, who now bid you a most cordial FAREWELL.

TO THE STUDENTS.

Young gentlemen of Nassau Hall. We are leaving the innocence of these sweet retirements, where virtue loved to dwell with study,

where the pleasing occupation of taste and genius presented no objects of temptation to our opening passions, where the exertions of the mind, and the emotions of the heart, were at once elevated and pure. May you rightly prize those blessings which you still possess! While you drink at the pure fountain of Knowledge, may your hearts become more refined, and your judgment more matured! May you so profit by your present advantages, that when you reach the period at which we have arrived, you may reflect with pleasure that you have done justice to yourselves, to your instructors, to your friends and to society! Our feelings at this moment cannot be expressed. May you be wise! may you be virtuous! may you be happy! Dear fellow-students, we bid you a most affectionate FAREWELL.

But how shall I part from the companions of my studies, how can I bid adieu to the friends with whom I have been so long and so closely united! When I reflect, that this is the last day we shall sustain towards each other the relation of classmates, that this

tender tie of youthful intimacy is to exist no more — my whole heart dissolves in infant tenderness. This day forever disunites us from our collegiate pursuits, and consigns us to the cares and disquietudes of the world. Oh my friends, at some future period, after having been long tossed on the ocean of active life, haply should we reach some craggy weather-beaten rock of safety and repose, how interesting and desirable will the tranquil scenes of our earlier days appear! The many hours we have passed in the alternate pursuits of science and amusements, will descend like the soft light of the evening on our pensive minds. But why do I recall them? they are gone and mingled with the years beyond the flood. Nay, while I yet speak, time, impatient to be gone, slides from beneath us, and demands our separation. That event, so afflictive in prospect, is now at hand. As a class we are now assembled for the last time. For the last time it is my lot to address you. To morrow we part, possibly forever. Each takes his different path in life, never perhaps to meet again till the last trump shall wake us from the dust, and convene

us in the presence of our Maker and our Judge. May he watch over us through life, and when we have finished the task alloted us below, may he reunite us in those mansions of bliss, where we shall never, never part again! But whither am I led? why thus protract the moment of separation! However severe we must meet it. Adieu then my friends, my classmates, my brothers. My heart is too full — FAREWELL — FOREVER — FAREWELL.

TO THE AUDIENCE.

From an audience whose patient attention we have experienced, we cannot part without expressing the grateful sense we entertain of their goodness. Flattered by their recent attention, and emulous of their future praise, may our aim be to press on with ardor to the temple of science; and, lighted on our way by the blended rays of truth and virtue, we doubt not of their benevolent wishes that we may become useful to our country, and blessings to the human race.